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**The Iowa Blind History Archive
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project
Interview with [Name]
Conducted by [Name]
[Date]
Transcribed by [Name]**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

**Kristal Hagemoser Platt, 47, Omaha, NE
Louise Duvall
Iowa Department for the Blind Building
10/2/2010**

Louise Duvall: All of the stories submitted to this project will become part of the history of blindness collection owned by the Department for the Blind. By submitting your story, you are acknowledging that your story is a gift which

transfers to the Iowa Department for the Blind all legal title and all literary property rights. You will be granting to the Iowa Department for the Blind an unrestricted license to use your recording and all the information which it contains in any manner the Department for the Blind may wish to use it for as long as the Iowa Department for the Blind wishes to use it. Do you agree to have your story recorded?

Kristal Platt: Yes.

Duvall: Would you state your name, age and where you live.

Platt: Kristal Platt, I am 47 years old and I live In Omaha, Nebraska.

Duvall: Okay. And, Kristal, could you tell me how long have you been blind?

Platt: Since I was approximately eight or nine.

Duvall: And, the cause?

Platt: Stargardt, which is a form of juvenile macular degeneration.

Duvall: Okay. And, so has that left you totally blind?

Platt: No, I have, well they stopped counting in the 20 over whatever and did say I can count fingers at a foot.

Duvall: So, you have some useful vision.

Platt: Right.

Duvall: Okay. In general, what would you like to talk about today?

Platt: Well, in terms of how my story might contribute to the Department for the Blind, I was thinking back and remembered that I had the privilege of giving Barbara Bush a tour when she was campaigning on behalf of her husband back in 1987 for presidency.

And, then later in the spring of 1988, and I'll have to maybe ask you for some help with some of the names of the Commission. I can't remember if it was called the Commission back then, division, but essentially services for the Blind were under an umbrella agency. I remember that umbrella agency was something like...

Duvall: Department of Human Rights.

Platt: Thank you! I thought it had a longer name than that.

Duvall: Now, Iowa Department of Human Rights.

Platt: Yes! So, then along with other folks, including Lisa Davis, she and I went to the capitol numerous times to talk to legislators and explain the funding of rehabilitation services and how being under the umbrella agency affected our funding. And, that being a separate agency, studies had shown how much better, how much more successful closings closures there are being a separate agency.

Duvall: Okay, all right! Just as a comment, I spent the afternoon in the recreation room and I saw your picture and Barbara Bush on the wall, so I'm glad you're going to share how that picture came about. So, let me ask you when you were about eight or nine, when you began to know that you were blind or significantly losing your vision. Were you in public school at the time?

Platt: Yes, in public school.

Duvall: Did you stay in public school until you graduated or did you attend the residential school for the blind?

Platt: Never residential, only public.

Duvall: Only public, and so what did you have for assistance for your increasing loss of vision?

Platt: I had, well, initially I was able to use Large Print successfully, and even actually before that regular print was okay, but about that time was also the time that regular textbooks transitioned from a little larger print to smaller print and that was, of course, the time that my vision changed. So, I began to use large print books, books on tape and going into high school. I needed, really I couldn't read large print books quickly enough to get the information digested so I had live readers then who would read some of that material to me. And, I'm sure one of your next questions is going to be about Braille, and I got the feeling that I always did well in school. And, even though I spent hours and hours in the evenings doing my homework, people looked at my grades and not at my efficiency. And so, I

remember having just a little hint of Braille suggested, but it was never...and that wasn't actually until I was in college, so in high school I didn't have any Braille instruction.

Duvall: But, you did have live readers and you had taped books.

Platt: Yes!

Duvall: Alright! So, then after you graduated from high school, what was your next major step in life?

Platt: I went to college. I went to Iowa State University and ended in majoring in Zoology and minored in Spanish. And, I would say that was a big transition for me in terms of how I managed my blindness. I guess I would say I was always open in high school to people asking me, but I didn't let them know that so they didn't realize I was approachable. So, what I did in college was right away I said, I stood up at the first floor meeting and said, "This is who I am and I may not be able to recognize your face. It's going to take me a little while longer to kinda put your style clothing that you wear, your voice, which door you come out of and associate all those to be able to tell who you are," and a few things I said. And, oh, I said, "If you see me on campus, say who you are so I know who's saying "Hi" to me." And, I said, "Like all of you, I can't recognize the dorm food so you'll have to tell me what it is," and, of course, that made them laugh. It was kind of a way to break the ice. And, after that I just loved my college experience. I went from being a wallflower in high school to...I just loved Iowa State. I was an RA the last for the last two years of college then Resident Assistant...

Duvall: When you were a Junior and Senior.

Platt: Right!

Duvall: Now, I happen to know that you have a lot of initials after your name representing your levels of education, so what came next?

Platt: Then I went on to Madison, Wisconsin and got my masters degree in Medical Genetics.

Duvall: Okay. And, still using tapes?

Platt: Right, primarily visual techniques. By that time I had a closed circuit T.V. that I used, not really to read, but maybe to scan things or look at graphs or those kinds of things. But, to read a great deal, it was just not efficient and I did not know Braille at that time.

Duvall: Live readers and tapes.

Platt: Correct!

Duvall: Fine, and next?

Platt: Next, I had an experience that I've actually told some people here before because I remember Sandy Tigges remembered it. And, that was I was in a parking lot with some other people and I was leading the way and I tripped, not falling completely, but tripped on one of those cement blocks that cars pull up to. And, walked a few more paces

and tripped again. I thought well that's strange, I don't usually trip. And, then I realized it was because I was leading the way instead of following. And, quite literally, I decided that if I want to be a leader in life, I better learn some more skills. Otherwise, I'll have to follow people for the rest of my life. So, that and also giving presentations and having to have the cards so close to my face that it muffled my voice, those two things made me realize that I needed to learn cane travel and Braille so I wouldn't have to have the cards in front of my face.

Duvall: An "Aha," moment.

Platt: Yes.

Duvall: Aha moment! So, this leads us up to...

Platt: Going to the Department for the Blind, to the Center.

Duvall: All right! And so, you came to the Center in what year?

Platt: It was 1987. It was following graduate school and before looking for a position, a job.

Duvall: So, you came like in June or...

Platt: Right.

Duvall: The summer.

Platt: Right.

Duvall: Okay, all right! And, so we want to work our way here to the Barbara Bush story. Tell me how that came about.

Platt: I remember that she wanted to visit here and I'm not sure what the connection was, who happened to know her, but I do recall that the Chairperson of the Republican Women's committee, I'm probably not saying the right name. She came with Barbara Bush the actual day of the tour and that there were many social, not social, secret securities.

Duvall: Oh, Secret Service.

Platt: Secret Service, thank you, with her when she came. And, the very first thing I remember is getting on the elevator with the Chairperson and Barbara Bush was going to take the stairs, and so I found myself not even with her but going up the elevator without her. So, it was just kind of comical the way it, but once we got connected again, so it was neat. We had the students that were at the Center positioned in various places and so stopped by each place; then the students explained what they were doing. So, really every one, every student got an opportunity to speak to her and meet her and that was, I think really for most people, a thrill to be able to say that they met the woman who would eventually be the first lady.

Duvall: I was trying to think, I don't mean to imply that Republicans or Democrats have had more influence on the Department, but at one time we had the president, let's see, she was the Chairman of the National Committee and she

was one of our three Commissioners. But, it was before your time in the Center.

At another time one of our former students gave the seconding speech at the Republican National Convention when Bob Dole was being nominated as a candidate for Vice President. Let's see, so we have had, we've had occasional contact at the national level with, with the politicians and every time we do it, it's a good thing.

15:00

Platt: Maybe that first connection is what led to Barbara Bush coming here.

Duvall: Could be!

Platt: She also sent me a thank you note afterwards that I still have that I thought was very sweet.

Duvall: Yes!

Platt: So, she was, she is, a woman of integrity and thoughtfulness. So, I was just very privileged and honored to have given her a tour.

Duvall: I think there are conclusions to be drawn. You talked about coming to the Center because you wanted to lead, not follow. You got to meet the future President's wife and you led a tour for that. You have also, I don't mean to be putting words in your mouth, but I want to transition to the next story, which is that you took a leadership role in advocating for blind individuals in what you thought was the

best provider, best method, to provide services to the blind. Can you talk about what preparation you had before you went over and started way-laying the legislators?

Platt: A lot of it was simply educating ourselves about how vocational rehabilitation services are funded. And, I don't know, I can't recall if that was something we talked about in Business Class. If someone is listening to this and doesn't know what Business Class is, it's the business of blindness. Basically, talking about issues, misconceptions, stigmas, all the kinds of things we have to deal with as blind people in a discussion to help people think about how they address or stereotype those kinds of ideas. So I, I can't recall but easily one of our sessions may have been on funding of vocational rehabilitation services, and realizing that for every state dollar that goes in many, many more federal dollars match and bring that money into the state. So, if you cut your fed., excuse me, if you cut your state funding then you cut your federal funding much, much more. So, you are really doing a disservice to your entire state to cut state funding. In addition, for every blind person you get to work, that person is paying into the tax system instead of drawing back social security or drawing back a way to live.

Duvall: For people who are really number crunchers, those two arguments ought to be highly, highly persuasive. We, many years we tried to educate those people who have power over the agency and the future of services, and although they find the human interest stories very interesting, they really need to know and understand the bottom dollar, the bottom line, which is money and especially in this economy.

Platt: Right. And, I can't remember the exact statistics, so I want to say it's 20% State to 80% Federal. That's not quite right.

Duvall: That is right.

Platt: Okay! That's 23 years years of memory or so, but that is, of course, a very influential statistic, because of a lot...

Duvall: I hate to end our recording...

Platt: Can I add one quick thing and that was my representative was Johnie Hammond, who was from Ames. And, that was my first opportunity to meet her. And, afterwards, five years later when I got married, she sent me a personal note after seeing my husband and my engagement in our local newspaper. And, again, I thought was so sweet of her.

Duvall: She remembered you.

Platt: She remembered me.

Duvall: Yes!

Platt: And, sent me a personal note. Wasn't that nice of her?

Duvall: I will also tell you that this spring, when money was tight and there was a kind of a power struggle going among

the various Republicans to see who was going to win the primary for the candidate as governor, Governor Branstad mentioned the fact that many blind, no, that many legislators were afraid of the tap, tap, tap of canes and that he had stood up to that. But, he, of course, was referring to the period of time when you, and Lisa and others, were very involved in educating the legislature. And, we haven't, we haven't been threatened like that for the last 20 years, and so that lesson was well learned. But, the tap, tap, tap of canes was a powerful motivator. All right, if you're going to take your tour, we need to stop, unfortunately.

18:18

(End of Recording)

Mary Clarke

11-15-2010